



Washington Veterans Home

1910-1980

70th Anniversary

SUNNY-

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How It All Began

The history of the Washington Veterans' Home really began on the battlefields of the Civil War. During this crisis in our nation's history, thousands of men and boys were transformed from farmers, craftsmen, students, and shopkeepers into soldiers, willing to fight and die for what they believed in. It was for the survivors of this tragic conflict, for the Civil War veterans, that the Home was originally established.

Some forty years had passed since the last shot of the war was fired, and many of the veterans were reaching the age where they could no longer support themselves and were in need of domiciliary care. Social Security was still many years in the future, and medical science of that day did not include geriatrics. The wonder drugs we have today had not yet come into the picture, and life expectancy was much shorter than it is now. Most of the Civil War veterans were even worse off than the average person of their age as they still carried physical and emotional scars from the time they had spent in battle.

Although Washington had a Soldiers' Home at Orting which had been opened in 1890, this Home was small and did not provide for the wives of veterans, except in colony houses outside the grounds. There was need for a new facility to provide care for veterans and their wives.

The needed facility might not have been built for several more years if it had not been for the money panic of 1906-1907. The entire country suffered during this financial crisis. Many corporations were forced to pay their employees with script rather than money. There was little or no credit to be had by anyone.

These conditions did much to focus the attention of the state legislatures upon the distress and need of many Civil War veterans. The State of Washington was one of the first states to do something about it.

The Session Laws of 1907, HB #9, which included the Enabling Act to establish the Washington Veterans' Home was passed by the State Legislature and signed by Governor Albert E. Mead on March 13, 1907. This Act provided that no man with a pension of \$24 or more was to be eligible for membership, nor was any wife who had not been married to the veteran before 1905. Another provision of the Act stipulated that the Home was to be located upon land overlooking the waters of Puget Sound.

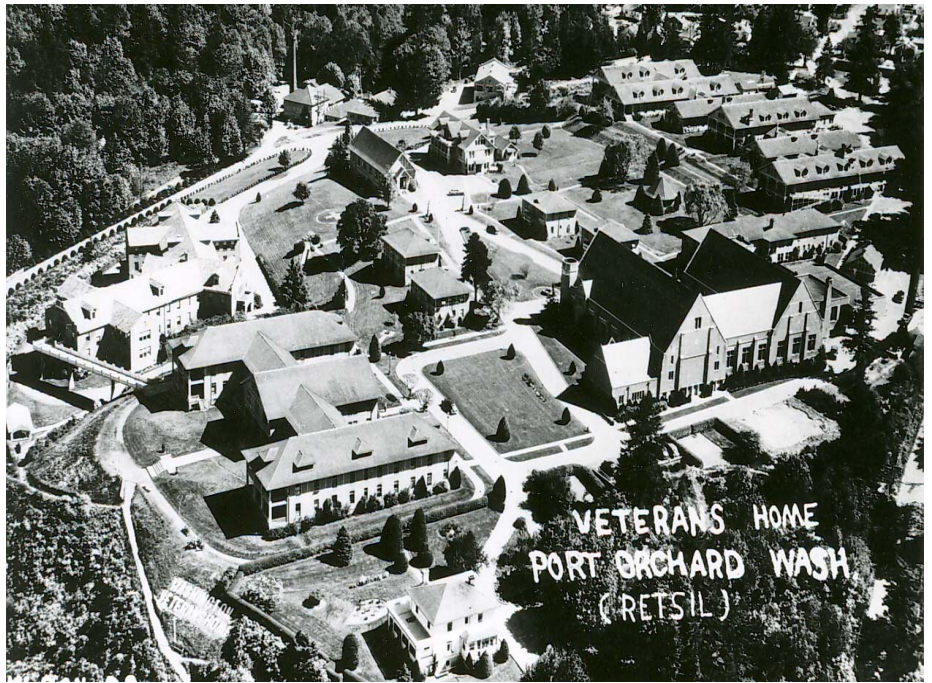


Washington Soldiers Home, Orting WA

The sum of fifty thousand dollars was appropriated to be used by the Board of Control as required. The Board, which consisted of five legislators appointed by the Governor, was authorized to purchase a site, construct buildings, and supervise maintenance.

Many communities wanted to be chosen as the location for the Home, but the competition had soon narrowed down to Anacortes on Rosario Straits and Annapolis on Sinclair Inlet. Most of the efforts to get the new institution located in Annapolis were in the hands of Port Orchard businessmen. Three are remembered as the leaders: Guy Wetzel of the Port Orchard Independent; J.M. Peterson, County Auditor; and Ed Howe, a leading businessman.

Anacortes was pushing hard to have the institution located there, but the Port Orchard group was more aggressive. They had ideas and the initiative to carry them out. Among the activities planned by this group was a picnic on the beach of Sinclair Inlet. They invited more than 150 Grand Army veterans from Seattle and vicinity to this picnic which was pitched on the property for sale as the Home site. The property was rather rough terrain to use as Gaffner Gardens. It was owned by William Tell Gaffner who had purchased it from the Indians; the story has it, for one dollar an acre. Gaffner had it logged off many years before and it was thickly covered with young trees and brush.



The picnic was a great success, and those attending were impressed with the site and the promotional effort. The speeches were carefully prepared to cover every detail of the tract's advantages: the magnificent scenic views of mountains and water, the ease of access, the proximity to large centers of population, accessibility of pure water, climate, etc. The efforts of the promoters were well rewarded, for the selection committee recommended the Gaffner tract and the Board of control promptly purchased the tract, paying a sum of \$6,600 according to available records. Many familiar with real estate methods in those days gave the picnic immeasurable credit for the sale. Anacortes had a fine site, as well, but did not stage their selling efforts as effectively as did Port Orchard.

There were several lots adjoining the selected site on the south side that were not included in the tract the Board of control purchased. The records are somewhat hazy as to how these sites were acquired. The Port Orchard committee is generally credited with raising an amount of between \$4,000 and \$6,000 (one record states \$3,940.50) to purchase these lots. Mr. J.M. Peterson, who was County Auditor at the time, later recalled that although the population of Port Orchard was less than 1,000 at the time, there were 117 donations received. The records in possession of Mr. Peterson indicated the following persons and business concerns were the heaviest contributors: George Miller, Lehmann Brothers, H.A. Davies, P.H. Seay, A. Larson, J.M. Dickenson, J.D. Sponogle, Kitsap Lbr. Co., C.W. Clausson, A. Nelson, Fraternal Brotherhood, J.D. Yokey.

Once the site had been acquired, the next matter to be addressed was the selection of a Superintendent of the new Home. The Governor had intended to appoint George Tibbets, a Civil War veteran who had been a member of the site selection committee. A legal obstacle prevented the appointment of Mr. Tibbets because he had served on the committee that selected the site. An alternative suggestion was that George Tibbets take charge of the Soldiers' Home at Orting and the present Superintendent of that Home transfer to Annapolis. William L. Ames was an able superintendent and liked his job at Orting, but was quite ready to go to Annapolis as planning and construction were more in his line. Mr. Ames transferred to the new Home and brought along his wife as Matron and Z.L. King as Adjutant.

Construction Commences

Actual construction began in 1908, but much clearing, grading and road building had been done already. A dam had been built across Crosley Creek one mile above the home site, and a ten-inch fir stave pipe line was being installed. Graph & Co., Architects, had laid out the sites and prepared the plans for the first buildings.

The people of Port Orchard were of invaluable assistance in every way possible, before long existing hazards and many inconveniences had been overcome and work was underway.

Superintendent Ames found himself with a big job on his hands. There was much small timber to be cleared away, and the ground was rough and rocky. The only road to the property was along the waterfront and ended at the site. There was a creek running across the property but the only way it could be utilized for human needs was by means of buckets. The large number of men to be engaged in the construction would require shelter as well as food and other supplies. There was only one house on the property and not many vacant or available in the neighborhood, which made for a very unforgiving situation.



Rosecliff Cottage

The first two buildings were built by day labor under the direction of Superintendent Ames and Chief Engineer McDowell. They were the Rosecliff and Bayview cottages, two identical structures designed to accommodate eight couples each.

Mr. J.E. McDowell came to this project from Orting at the request of the Superintendent. He was an experienced man in building and power plant operation. He remained on this job for nearly forty years, retiring in October 1949. Mr. McDowell married the daughter of Superintendent and Mrs. Ames in 1912, and their two children were born at Retsil.

An old cottage at the foot of the hill was remodeled and served as quarters for the Superintendent until new housing could be built for him on the hill. It was completely renovated in 1915 (at a cost of \$300) and was then used as the adjutant's home. Here also was the first office. It too was later remodeled with a bath and lavatory being installed and housed seven members.

The Washington Building was the next to be completed. It was originally known as the Washington Barracks and accommodated single men. Lance & Peters, General Contractors, built the Washington



The Superintendent's Home, built in 19-- is still used by the current superintendent.



The first members of the Wahington Barracks

Barracks and the main dining room and kitchen, which were constructed at about the same time.

Other construction projects underway at this time included a power plant and a laundry facility. The first power plant was equipped with three boilers for furnishing steam heat for the buildings and laundry. Generators also produced power for lighting the buildings and grounds and supplied power for the operation of machinery throughout the Home. The laundry machinery was originally powered by a 15-horsepower steam engine before electric motors were installed to provide energy for the belt-driven washing machines and irons. During the early years, the laundry was staffed mainly by members of the Home.



The Original Laundry House

It was decided that February 22, 1910, would be the day for the formal dedication and admission of the first members. It was a photo finish for it seemed impossible to have things ready by then. The winter was a pleasant one, though, and work went on with little or no interruption. The Home was ready for occupancy on the date selected.

The First Decade

In anticipation of the opening of the new Home, some of the applicants were already living on the property in tents and shanties which they set up on a stretch of beach across the road from the Home. Among them was C.D. Rowley, who was a member of the new Home. He did not join the beach colony until a few days before the opening date. He got up early on February 22nd and was first in line to be admitted. Although he fulfilled his wish of becoming the first



Waiting Applicants

member of the Home, Mr. Rowley did not have a long residence at the Home. He died on May 1, 1910, just sixty-nine days after entering the Home. He was the first to be buried in the Home's cemetery.

The second man to be admitted also achieved a "first" –although one of dubious distinction. He got drunk, tried to kill a fellow member and was dishonorably discharged from the Home three months later.

The total number of men and women registered the first day was 127. By the end of the year, the total had increased to 187. These men and women came from every section of the state.

Many additions and improvements were made to the Home during the first few years that it was open, including the construction of several more buildings.

The legislature had appropriated \$65,000 for building and equipping a hospital, and work got underway immediately on this project. The hospital was completed in 1912. Medical attention at this time was administered by a physician from Port Orchard. Within a year after completion of the hospital, a surgeon was appointed to the staff and shortly thereafter a nurse and steward were added. At this time patients were being brought to the Port Orchard Home from Orting for medical care.

Two more cottages, Illahee and Amiga, which served the same purpose and were off the same design as Rosecliff and Bayview cottages, were built in 1913.

In 1913 the state Legislature passed a law authorizing the admission of veterans' widows to the Home. The first widow was admitted on April 2, 1914, and 122 widows were admitted during the next 12 months. It was necessary to provide quarters for these women. A request for an appropriation of \$25,000 for housing was made and granted. Additions were made to the hospital, now known as the McKinley Building, and the Sherwood Building was erected to accommodate 48 women.



The Olympia Building, then called the Barracks Building, was constructed in 1914. It was located on the site of the present main office and served as the administration office and domiciliary quarters.

There were about 330 Civil War veterans and their wives in the Home in 1913. By September 1916, the total membership had grown to 545 members. The first Spanish American War veterans were admitted in 1914. Continued expansion of the facilities was necessary to accommodate this growing membership.



The Olympic Building

During 1914, an Assembly Hall was built, the basement of which was to be used for an amusement room with pool and billiard tables and other recreational facilities. This building now houses the Home chapel.

At about the same time, new quarters were built for the Superintendent on a scenic point of land on the hill, and the old house at the foot of the hill was remodeled to be used as the Adjutant's home. A carpenter shop was constructed with a stable underneath for the horses that drew the hearse and did other heavy work around the grounds. The main kitchen had new cement floors and tiles installed, and it was equipped with modern labor-saving conveniences. Much landscaping was done and an electric cable and arc lights for the grounds were installed. A 30-horsepower Enberg engine was installed as an auxiliary in the power house and was used during the day to run the electric motors for the ice plant, laundry, dishwashing machine, etc.

About one and one quarter acres of land on the lower portion of the grounds was cleared, drained, and put into cultivation. An orchard of 200 fruit trees was planted on the hillside to supply the institution with fruit. It was recommended that a sea wall be built to keep the high tides from washing the land but action on this plan wouldn't develop until years later.



Veterans Home Cemetery

The original cemetery at the foot of the hill, where the sewage disposal plant now stands, had soon become too small and not suitable for a burial site. Ten acres of land had been purchased on the hill east of the Home, and in 1914, a portion of this land was cleared and fenced for a new cemetery. A road was graded and water service was extended to serve the cemetery. The remains in the old cemetery were then moved to the new location.

During the period 1914-1915 a new concrete reservoir with a capacity of 100,000 gallons was erected a mile and one-half south of the Home on higher ground, where a perpetual flow of running water insured abundant supply for domestic use and for the sprinklers.



Retsil Post Office

In 1916, during the administration of Governor Lister, the Washington Veterans' Home post office was officially designated "Retsil" – the Governor's name spelled in reverse. The post office was located in the Washington Barracks until 1953 when it was moved to its present location. During these early years, the Retsil mail was picked up at the Port Orchard Post Office, brought to the Home and distributed to the members. In 1968, the Retsil Post Office was made a branch of the Port Orchard Postal Station.

To maintain the Home at this time required a force of nearly fifty people. Besides the Superintendent and his wife as Matron, the force included an Adjutant, Physician, quartermaster, stenographer, engineer, three firemen, four laundry workers, two cooks, four pot and dishwashers, ten dining

room girls, two captains of barracks, eight nurses, and two janitors, besides help for special work. Maintenance of the Home cost approximately \$8,000 monthly.

As some of the original buildings were nearly ten years old now, a maintenance program had been set up. Painting the buildings was a continuous project as well as replacement of some of the flooring, roofing, etc.

Major improvements undertaken during the last few years of this first decade included adding another four-wing dormitory, an officers' dining room, and a diet kitchen to the hospital building (McKinley Building); a morgue and garage at the rear of the hospital; and grading and graveling a permanent driveway from the country road to the office.

The population had increased from 187 at the end of the first year to 863 in September, 1920. Of these, 459 were Civil War veterans and 17 were Spanish American War veterans. The remaining 387 were wives and widows. Approximately fifty percent of the members were on "extended furlough" status.



Grand Army of the Republic Veterans

At Retsil, during this time, the advanced age of all the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) veterans brought to the home more members who were unable to take care of themselves so the hospital force was increased considerably. By September 30, 1922 the population was 426 Civil War veterans, 28 Spanish War Veterans, and 3 World War veterans for a total of 457. There was still a great deal of friction between the GAR veterans and those of the Spanish War, creating a sizable problem for the Administration. It had grown to proportions where, in a few cases, enforced furloughs were found to be necessary in the interest of discipline. It was difficult to convince the Civil War men that the Spanish War veterans were not interlopers but had the same rights as themselves.

The 1920's

By 1920, the Washington Veterans' Home was a well-established institution. The rapid, almost frenzied, pace of development which had taken place since 1908 had resulted in a facility which was, for that time, very complete and modern. No additional major construction was necessary until the end of the decade.



The first aerial view of the Veterans' Home on record was taken during the 1920's. In the immediate foreground of the photo (shown right) are the Washington Barracks and the Superintendent's quarters. At middle right are the dining hall, kitchen, and Sherwood Building. At upper center stands the McKinley Building (hospital) with all of its additions. The Assembly Hall and Olympia Barracks are in the center left with the four cottages in the center. A bandstand can be seen between the McKinley Building and the cottages. At the far left are the powerhouse and laundry. The fruit orchard dots the hillside to the left of the Washington Barracks.

During the 1920's, the emphasis was on maintenance and improvements to the grounds and existing buildings. Roadways were surveyed and the grounds beautified. A galvanized roof replaced the old shingle roof of the powerhouse, which was a dangerous fire hazard. A new hot water system was installed, and a filter system was added to the water supply. The dining room and kitchen were remodeled and enlarged to accommodate added employees and members. A new bake oven and range replaced the original appliances.



WASHINGTON BARRACKS

In 1926, a whitewashed rock sign was placed on the hillside facing the bay. This sign can be seen in the photo of the Washington Barracks. During World War II, members kept the sign covered with brush for security reasons; after time it became completely overgrown, and gradually deteriorated.

The position of a head gardener was established in 1928. This enabled a more complete landscaping program to be instituted and the grounds soon became even more attractive to visitors and members.

The period 1920 to 1930 saw many changes in status of membership. Veterans of yet another war, World War I, were beginning to enter the Home. In 1922 there were three World War I veterans included in the membership. The advancing years were wearing away at the civil War veterans, and the Spanish-American veterans attained a majority of the membership.

Each year more veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic came to the Home in need of considerable care, thus necessitating an increase in the hospital staff. In 1929 the average age of the Civil War veterans was 84.5 years, the youngest being 82 years old. Scarcely a week passed without seeing one or more of them transferred to the hospital where they could receive constant care. The Spanish War Veterans attained a majority of the membership during this period and it made a better feeling between the different factions. The Civil War men were passing on with more and more frequency, and the Spanish War men would carry the flag and conduct the patriotic services and eventually assumed the duty of conducting funerals for the Civil War men. Antagonism gradually disappeared and a feeling of real comradeship prevailed.

It soon became apparent that additional hospital facilities were needed. Not only were the Civil War veterans requiring increasing amounts of hospital care, but the membership at this time included about 400 members who were on extended furlough status. These members had the right to reenter the Home whenever they were in need of hospital treatment. Funds were allocated for this much-needed project, and construction of a new hospital began in 1929.

The 1930's

The new hospital which had been started in 1929 was formally opened in 1931. The new structure was designed to have a capacity of 110 to 120 beds. It was considered to be a very modern facility, with ramps for wheelchairs; a pharmacy and outpatient clinic; a dining area for the ambulatory patients and members needing special diets, as the main kitchen did not handle any dietary cooking at this time; and small apartments in the basement where couples could reside together when one of them required hospital treatment. It was thought that this new structure was large enough to handle all of the hospital needs of the members for many years to come. This thinking has since changed, of course due to the unforeseen events of World War II, Korea and Vietnam.



Opening of the hospital relieved congestion throughout the Home. The portion of the McKinley Building which had been occupied by the old hospital was converted to housing, mainly for married couples. The housing facilities of the Home now consisted of four large buildings (the McKinley, Olympia, Sherwood, and Washington Buildings) and four cottages. This housing would be adequate for many more years, until deterioration began to take its toll on the wooden structures.

The Olympia Building was the first of the original buildings to fall victim to the ravages of time. The old wooden structure was considered to be a fire hazard, and during the period 1933 through 1935 most of the building was demolished, leaving only the portion which housed the main office.

During the first half of the 1930's, many improvements were made to the Home grounds. A professional gardener was added to the Staff who devoted all his time to landscaping. Terraces adjoining the newly paved entrance roadway were studded with shrubbery, and the grounds were made more attractive in appearance than they had ever been in the past. A new steel flagpole was erected in the center of the grounds. In 1936, a greenhouse was built in which to grow flowers and plants for use in beautifying the grounds.

Construction began in 1936 on a building to house an assembly hall or auditorium, a main dining hall, a bakery, a kitchen, refrigeration rooms, a chapel, and a post exchange. This new building was designed to be beautiful as well as functional. Unlike the earlier buildings, which had been built of wood, this new building was constructed in brick and was built to last for many years.



Auditorium / Dining Hall

Dedication of this grand building was held May 7, 1939. It was quite a formal affair, attended by the Governor of the state of Washington, and featured drum and bugle corps, colorful bands, and quartets. A reception was held in the evening, followed by dancing. This was one of the most spectacular affairs ever staged at the Home. The Grand March displayed costumes representing all wars, worn by the members and guests. Minuets, Virginia Reels, and other dances of bygone eras were enjoyed by large crowd in attendance.

In 1935, ten more acres of land were purchased to add to the cemetery. With the help of the W.P. A., many improvements were made to the cemetery during the next five years. The road was resurfaced, the headstones were reset, and the grounds were fenced. A rock wall was erected along the road which divided the two sections. The eastern, or old, part was set aside for the Civil War veterans and their wives and widows. The western area was dedicated for the veterans of the World War and their spouses.

Two monuments were now in place in the cemetery. They were erected in memory of our country's veterans at their final resting place. One of the monuments was donated by the Women's Relief Corps and the other by the United Spanish War Veterans. Veterans of World Wars were later honored by a plaque presented by the local American Legion Post # 182, which was established at the Home in 1944.

By the end of the 1936 time had taken its toll. Present membership rolls were down.

Average age of Civil War Veterans92.5 years

Average age of Civil War widows83.6 years

Average age of Spanish War Veteran ...66.2 years

Average age of World War I Veteran ...46 years

Age of oldest member.....104 years

At the end of the 1930's, only four Civil War veterans remained at the Home. The Spanish-American War veterans were in the majority with 269 veterans whose ages averaged seventy years. There were 92 World War I veterans, with an average age of 50 years. The total population was about 745 members including those on extended furlough status.

Through the years 1937, 38, and 39 no new buildings were erected. A rock sea-wall was constructed to protect our waterfront from erosion by waves caused by passing ships going to and from the Navy Yard. Additional ground around the reservoir was cleared and a trestle was constructed carrying a ten-inch water main to connect the two reservoirs.

The 1940's

During the years 1940 and 1946, little publicity was given to the Home. There was a war being fought and newspapers were stretched to capacity to keep the public informed on that score. There is scarcely a photograph to be found and records were very sketchy during those years. Every able-bodied member here at that time made an effort to do their "bit" for the war effort, and picture taking and record keeping were of lesser importance.

For several years after the new hospital was built there was little accomplished. Funds were not available. Much attention was given to beautifying the grounds. The greenhouse was modernized, and neglected areas were cultivated and flowers and shrubbery planted. Members of service organizations continued to donate equipment to the hospital.

In 1942, shortly after Pearl Harbor, the peaceful routine of the Home was interrupted. Activity at the Bremerton Navy Yard was stepped up, and thousands of people were hired to carry the workload. There was not enough housing available in the Bremerton area to handle this influx of new workers. Government officials looked over the Home facilities in hopes of taking them over and having the veterans move to some other part of the state. This idea ran into so many obstacles that the idea was abandoned and housing projects were built close to the home to accommodate the overflow of Navy yard workers.

The upstairs rooms in the east end of the McKinley Building were vacated to accommodate Navy personnel. The widows who occupied these quarters were required to double up with others on the first floor. The old assembly hall was turned over to the Navy for headquarters and dining area.

A part of the grounds of the Chief Engineer's home at the bottom of the hill was taken over for a barrage balloon company. This resulted in an incident which was in keeping with the general confusion that prevailed at the time. The big balloon broke loose from its moorings one night and drifted over the grounds until its cables got tangled with the Home flagpole. The military personnel had to shoot it full of holes to prevent damage to the property. The thirty-fourth shot finally brought it to earth. The burst of gunfire caused considerable excitement among the members and community. Rumors were soon flying that the Japanese were attacking.

As was mentioned previously, every member did what they could to contribute to the war effort. All of those who could do any work found at least part-time employment in the shipyard or in the housing projects. These men and women who had already served in one war weren't about to let their country down during this war.



These cannons facing the Inlet, were sent to the shipyard for scrapmetal.

One side effect of World War II on the Veterans' Home was the loss of two cannons which once stood in back of the Washington Building, facing Sinclair Inlet. The story of how these cannons got here or what their significance was is rather hazy. One account has it that they had been used in the Philippines, while another indicated that they came from an old British war ship that sailed in these waters about the time of the Pig War in the San Juan Islands. It is unlikely that either of these stories will ever be verified, for the cannons no longer exist. They were donated for scrap metal for the war effort.



View House

World War II was eventually brought to a victorious conclusion, and life began to return to normal at the Home.

Soon after the war ended, construction began on a new laundry building. This building, which included a garage on the lower level, was completed in 1947. The old laundry building was completely renovated and is now used as the maintenance and repair shop.

A view house overlooking Bremerton, Manette, Bainbridge Island, and Sinclair Inlet was built in 1948 on a point of the land near the hospital. This shelter affords ambulatory patients a place to relax or entertain visitors while enjoying beautiful scenery in a peaceful environment. The view is particularly beautiful at night when the light of the ships and neighboring communities reflect in the water.

A bridge connecting the upper floor of the hospital with the higher level grounds near the Washington Building was built to facilitate easier access between the hospital and main part of the grounds. Since the Home is built on a hill, it had been necessary to maneuver up steep ramps or steps in order to go to and from the hospital. This was difficult for members, especially those in wheelchairs. The new bridge effectively eliminated these barriers between the hospital and the main part of the grounds.

A special ceremony was held in 1948 to dedicate the view house and the bridge.

Another addition to the Home at this time was an electric Hammond Organ for the auditorium. This organ was purchased with funds donated by the members.

During the decade of the 1940's, memories of Gettysburg... Antietam... Bull Run... Grant... Sheridan... Shiloh... Chickamauga... and the Wilderness became history as taps were sounded for the Home's last surviving Civil War veteran, James B. Caulkins. Mr. Caulkins answered his last roll call in October 1944 at the age of 98. The last survivor of the Civil War in the state of Washington died in 1951. He was Hiram R. Gale, 104 years of age, who had at one time been a member of the Home. Mr. Gale was one of the original three members of the committee chosen to select a site for the Veterans' Home. He helped in promoting the picnic that led to the selection of this site. The passing of these Civil War veterans marked the end of an era.



As one chapter in the Home's history was coming to an end, the first paragraphs of a new chapter were being written when, in October 1949, the first World War II veteran was admitted to membership.

Another first occurred for the Home in August 1949 when Ann Bent Luthi, a Spanish-American War nurse, entered the Home with her husband, also a SAW veteran. Mrs. Luthi was the first woman to enter the Home as a veteran. Records show that in February 1914 a nurse with the U.S. Volunteers, Mary J. Welch, was admitted with her SAW husband. At that time women veterans were not distinguished as such, though. It was not until May 24, 1938, that PL # 541 recognized that women nurses serving during the Spanish-American War under a 90-day or more contract were entitled to all benefits granted to veterans of that war. Many women veterans have entered the Home since 1949. We currently have nineteen female veterans among our membership.

The 1950's

Demand for in-resident membership had been steadily increasing, and it became apparent that it was necessary to either build a new veterans' facility or to make additions to the existing facilities. For several years these recommendations were made to the State Legislature. In November 1950, the State Department of Institutions approved \$800,000 to be used for additional housing of veterans at the Washington Veterans' Home. Of this amount, \$162,000 was to be used for improvements to the physical plant and \$638,000 was to be used for new construction.



The Veterans Home grounds following construction of the square in the 50's.



In order to make room for the planned new housing complex, three cottages were moved to another location on the grounds, and Rosecliff cottage and the remainder of the Olympia Building were demolished. Rosecliff cottage had been the first building constructed at the Home, and a special box had been placed in the cornerstone when construction started. This box was opened at an informal ceremony in September 1952. It contained copies of the Port Orchard Independent and the Bremerton News of April 4, 1908; the Seattle P.I. of April 6, 1908; and many other small mementoes of that day when construction began on the Home. On hand for this opening ceremony was Mr. J. E. McDowell, the first Plant Manager, who had been present when the box was placed in the building.

Formal groundbreaking for the new construction project was held on October 14, 1952. Many state and local dignitaries, as well as representatives of numerous veterans' organizations, were on hand for the groundbreaking ceremonies. Soon work began in earnest. Bulldozers, steam shovels, and earthmoving equipment cleared and graded the site in short order. Construction progressed rapidly until August 15, 1953, when fire destroyed the old power house and caused some delay in the housing construction work. Despite this delay, construction was completed in November 1953.

Dedication of the Home's largest construction program since its beginning was held on November 11, 1953. The occasion, which also commemorated the observance of Washington's 100th anniversary of becoming a territory, was observed with much fanfare. The oldest members of the Home, Mrs. Mallie Hawley and George Webster began the ceremonies with the ribbon cutting in the entrance hall of the Administration Building at 9:30 a.m. Throughout the day, the buildings and grounds overflowed with dignitaries and people who were touring the Home. The



Dedication of the Home's largest construction program since its beginning was

evening ceremonies were climaxed with a Grand March into the auditorium by the dignitaries present for the ball. The guests were dressed in the era of the 1850's. Much pomp and ceremony were observed at the ball which brought the dedication ceremonies at the Home and the Territorial Centennial to a close.

The new housing project was built around a "village square" which provided a convenient location to bring together a variety of services which had been established throughout the years in various locations on the grounds.

The post office, which had been located in Washington Building, moved to new, larger quarters on the square. The barber shop found a permanent location on the square, having been originally located in the Washington Barracks, then moved to a room in the back of the newly completed auditorium complex, then later moved back to the Washington Building. The beauty shop originated in the McKinley Building and was moved to its present location in 1953.

The snack Bar, a favorite gathering place for members, is located on the square directly across from the post office. Besides providing a place to enjoy a cup of coffee or a short order meal along with some friendly socializing, the Snack Bar area also houses several pool tables for the member's enjoyment. According to one account, the idea for the Snack Bar originated years ago when some of the men in the Washington Building took up a collection among themselves to buy coffee and doughnuts to enjoy while playing pool or pursuing heated arguments on politics. The Snack Bar was housed for several years in the McKinley Building before moving to its present location.



A Friendly game of pool or cribbage.

A small store called the Post Exchange is located on the square for the convenience of members. The P.X. is staffed by members and stocks a variety of foodstuffs, toiletries, health aids, and even some clothing and gift articles.

The new domiciliary rooms were built in a “U” around the perimeter of the square so that none of the rooms would be far from the center of activity. The buildings were constructed on several levels to take advantage of the contours of the site. Ramps were built to every level enabling a person to get around without climbing steps and for the use of wheelchairs. Additional funds had been appropriated in order to complete this project, the total cost of which was \$1,100,000.

When the construction project was completed, the administration office was moved from its location in the auditorium complex to a more convenient location on the square.

During 1955 it was decided to move the clinic from its quarters in the hospital to the space in the auditorium building which had been vacated by the office. This new location made the clinic much more accessible to domiciliary members. The additional space, and the generosity of members and veterans groups who donated money for furniture and equipment, made it possible for the Home to have a well-equipped, modern clinic.

During the winter of 1953, space was set aside in buildings 4 and 5 for hospital annexes for men and women. The annexes were a part of the Medical Department, and were reserved for members who were able to care for most of their own needs but who required constant medical supervision. This arrangement helped to relieve some of the demand for space in the hospital building.

As was mentioned earlier, the old power house was destroyed by fire in 1953. The fire was thought to have been started by workmen using welding torches to remove the old boilers. All other construction work was delayed for a time

while efforts were concentrated on building a new power plant to replace the 40-year old structure. Damage to the old power plant was estimated at \$150,000.

After the completion of the hospital, the McKinley Building had been converted to one-room dormitories for married couples and widows. By the 1950's, the upper-floor area was declared too hazardous for member residency. The single rooms on the main floor were deemed too small for couples' quarters so it was decided to remodel and make two-room apartments for the married members. In 1954, the widows moved from the congested McKinley Building to the Washington Building.

A familiar site around the Home during the 1950's was a small dog named "Tommy". The members had adopted Tommy as their mascot, and they all took great pleasure in smuggling him food and generally spoiled him rotten.

As the majority of Home members do not own cars, it was decided to purchase a bus to transport members to activities off the grounds. The first bus was purchased during the 1950's with money from the welfare fund. During later years, a wheelchair bus, two vans, and passenger cars were added to the transportation fleet. These vehicles are not only used to take members to recreational activities, but they are also used to transport members to and from outside hospitals and to medical and dental appointments.

In 1957 work was begun to install outside fire exits and other fire protection features on the remaining older buildings and a modern sewage treatment plant sufficient for the enlarged facilities, was built and put into operation thereby reducing the bay pollution problem that had been caused by emptying sewage into the bay.

The 1960's

The 1960's saw continued change in the demographic makeup of the Home's population. The ranks of the Spanish-American War veterans were diminishing, while the number of World War II veterans was on the rise. The first Korean veteran became a member of the Home in April 1966. The population at the beginning of 1960, including "extended furlough" members, stood at 74 Spanish-American War veterans, 222 World War I veterans, 41 World War II veterans, and 522 wives and widows, making a total membership of 859.

From the late 1920's through July 1961, the institution operated on "extended furlough" status or "at large" membership which permitted members to live away from the Home as on furlough, but with the right to re-enter and benefit by hospital treatment, medication, etc. whenever necessary. It became apparent, with the increasing number of veterans, many of whom were requiring more intensive care, that our facilities could not handle this type of program. It was impossible to budget for the uncertain need of the extended furlough population. Therefore, this status was eliminated in July 1961 and permanent residents only were retained as members. The population then stabilized at an average of 450 members.

Due to deterioration and the cost of maintenance of the old structure, the Washington Building was declared unsafe for occupancy and was deactivated in 1963. The tired old building stood vacant for the remainder of the decade.

The same year also saw a major change in the use of another of the original old buildings. The Hobby Lobby was moved out of the old Assembly Hall, and the interior was completely renovated and converted to a chapel. The Home Chapel was dedicated on August 3, 1963.



During the mid-60's, fiberglass roof coverings were constructed over the walkways connecting most of the buildings. These walkways make it possible for the members to get from one area of the grounds to another under shelter from the rain which is such a persistent factor in our weather. At about the same time, a fiberglass roof was added to cover the patio outside the lounge in Building 2.

An earthquake rocked the area on April 4, 1965, causing minor damage to several of the buildings. The most serious damage was to the power-house stack. The bricks were loosened many feet below the top and had to be replaced.

Gas was installed in 1965 as the primary fuel for heating the water for the institution's power and central heating system.

By the end of the 1960's, the population had changed so that the membership was now made up of three Spanish-American War veterans; 165 World War I veterans, with an average age of 76 years; 84 World War II veterans, averaging 63 years of age; three Korean War veterans; and 188 wives and widows.

The 1970's

This decade saw major changes in all aspects of the Home, including the physical plant, the administration, the philosophy of treatment, and the variety of programs offered to Home members.

Reflecting nationwide changes in attitudes towards the elderly and the handicapped, the basis for policies and programs at the Home gradually shifted from an emphasis on maintenance care to a philosophy of treatment, and the variety of programs offered to Home members.

During 1974, a legislative appropriation set up funds for Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Recreation, and A.T.P. (Alcohol Treatment Program) services. This was the first time that funds had been appropriated for these types of services.

Immediate action was taken to establish the newly funded programs. Staff was hired and equipment purchased. The members were soon enjoying the benefits of these new services.

An Alcoholism Treatment Program was established to meet the special needs of the alcoholics at the Home. It was felt that these members could benefit from a program of comprehensive treatment and ongoing support that was aimed at their special situation. Most treatment programs that existed outside of the Home were oriented towards younger, bread-winning alcoholics, and would not accept older or disabled alcoholics who might not respond quickly enough to fit into their limited time schedule. The Home's A.T.P. program can be paced to the individual's own need.

Ken Van Rooy came to the Home in 1974 as the Recreational Director. He immediately began setting up a recreation program designed to offer the members a schedule of interesting and varied activities to enrich their leisure time. Veterans and civic groups from the community had been coming to the Home for many years to entertain the members with parties, bingo



McKinley Building

games, concerts, and numerous other activities. One of the first tasks of the new Recreation Director was to coordinate the efforts of these diverse groups into a comprehensive recreation program.

Some major changes in the Administration of the Home took place during 1975 and 1976. The two veterans' homes were at that time administered by the Department of Social and Health Services. Home members and many veterans organizations throughout the state felt that the needs of the states veterans could be better met by the establishment of a separate Department of Veterans Affairs, and they made a concerted effort to let their legislators know how they felt. In 1975, Representative Paul Connors introduced Bill # 2006 to create a separate Department of Veterans Affairs. The bill was approved, and the separation from D.S.H.S. took place on June 24, 1976. Mr. Donald Ryan was appointed as Director of the new Department of Veterans Affairs.

Lewis Belcher, Jr., took over the duties of Department Director on April 1, 1977. A reception was held at the Home in May 1977 to welcome the new Director and to give the members and staff a chance to meet Mr. Belcher.

The 1970's saw increased interest by Home members in having a voice in the administration of the Home. A Members Advisory Council was established in 1974 by a group of interested members. The function of this Council was to make recommendations for projects that they felt would benefit the members. In 1975 the Retsil Veterans' Welfare Association was formed at the initiative of Home members to be a legal entity to provide representation for the membership of the Home.

A Revolving Fund was established in 1975 to replace what was previously known as the Welfare Fund. The Revolving Fund, which is made up primarily of money collected from members' over-income, is under the joint supervision of the Superintendent and a "duly constituted body representative of the members". The Welfare Fund had been under the sole control of the Director of Institutions. The Retsil Veterans' Association was given an overwhelming mandate to represent the members.

The changes that were taking place at the Home were not limited to the areas of administration and member life. Many changes were also made in the Home's physical plant.

In September of 1972, an old house at the bottom of the hill, which had been used at one time for the Business Manager's residence, was sold at auction and hauled away. The purchaser paid \$25.00 for the house, plus cost of having it moved off the grounds.

The Washington Building, which had been vacated in 1963, was finally demolished in 1973.

Some renovation and remodeling work was done on the old hospital (Building 9) during 1974. About twenty-five patients were temporarily moved to the McKinley Building while the construction work was going on. The ramp connecting the three floors of the hospital, which had been the only means for wheelchair patients to get from floor to floor, was removed and a passenger elevator was installed.

The McKinley Building was the oldest housing unit still in use at this time. The old wood building did not meet fire and safety regulations, and it would have been far too expensive to bring the building up to code. Cost of upkeep on the deteriorating structure was becoming prohibitive. For these reasons, it was decided to deactivate the building. The McKinley Building was vacated on January 14, 1976. Four years later, in January 1979, the building was demolished.



The advancing age of World War I & II veterans caused a steady increase in the demand for both light and skilled nursing care. Funds were approved in 1975 for construction of a new building to house members in need of intermediate, or light, nursing. The same appropriation included funds to remodel Building 9, the skilled nursing care unit; to bring other buildings up to all safety and health standards; to modernize the kitchen; and for demolition of the Sherwood Building.

Formal groundbreaking ceremonies were held on December 2, 1977, for the new nursing care unit (Building 10). Construction of this new 78-member unit was completed in 1979, and the first residents moved in on May 14, 1979.

As soon as Building 10 was completed, the nursing care members were moved from Building 9 to 10 and remodeling work got underway on Building 9. Extensive changes were made to the old nursing care unit to bring it up to all federal and state standards and to make it a more cheerful and efficient place in which to live and work. One major change was the reconstruction of the old hospital-like wards into smaller three-person



rooms. The ceilings were lowered; the walls were painted in attractive colors; wider, brightly colored doors were installed; and bath, toilet, and other facilities were redesigned to make them more accessible to handicapped persons. The nursing care members moved back into Building 9 on May 29, 1980

Members who need only intermediate level nursing care will now be housed in Building 10. Most of the members who had been living in the annexes will be converted to domiciliary units, giving the Home space for 40 more domiciliary members.

Another change which has taken place at the Home in the past ten years is in the makeup of our member population. The number of World War II veterans has been steadily increasing, while the ranks of World War I veterans have been declining. The first Vietnam veteran was admitted on April 19, 1976. The Home's population at the end of 1979 included 1 Spanish-American War veteran, 71 World War I veterans, 136 World War II veterans, 19 Korean veterans, and 90 wives and widows.

...And so we come to a new decade—the 1980's. We have no crystal ball to tell us what lies ahead, but we have a lot of hope that new treatments, new therapies, and improved facilities will make the Home not only a haven of comfort and security, but also a beacon of hope of a brighter future for the men and women who will make this their home in the years to come.

Countless groups and individuals have contributed to the growth and development of the Home over the past seventy years. This same kind of generous support will be an important factor in determining the future development of the Washington Veterans' Home as together we face the promises and challenges of the future.